

# **Gender Equity in Hospitality**

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# Praise for *Gender Equity In Hospitality*

In this much-needed study of the hospitality industry in India, Dr Payal Kumar provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges, as well as solutions, to women's advancement in leadership. Based on thought-provoking data from interviews with senior- and mid-level leaders in this sector, as well as data on gendered leadership representation, this book adds to literature by contextualizing gender diversity and equity issues in India, while providing far-reaching HR solutions needed to catapult the hospitality industry forward.

*Diana Bilimoria*, Professor and Chair of Organizational Behavior  
and KeyBank Professor, Case Western Reserve University, USA

This rigorous study on India's hospitality industry from a gendered lens is a notable contribution to the literature on gender and leadership in the Global South. Congratulations are in order to the author Payal Kumar for this invaluable monograph.

*Melissa Fisher*, Author of *Wall Street Women and Cultural Anthropologist*, NYU  
Institute for Public Knowledge & School of Professional Studies, USA

Women continue to lag behind men in most measures of employment and income, but the inequities women face in hospitality are even more significant, given greater occupational segregation, unusual work hours, gender bias, work-family conflict, and barriers to leadership roles. The COVID-19 pandemic further contributed to widening the gaps between women and men. Dr Payal Kumar has conducted extensive research and captured the inequities women face in the hospitality industry in India. Her book offers us an insightful account of how a strong paternalistic culture persists in hindering the advancement of women in the Indian hospitality industry.

*Eddy Ng*, Smith Professor of Equity and Inclusion in Business,  
Queen's University, Canada

Professor Payal Kumar's book, *Gender Equity in Hospitality: The Case of India*, makes very timely and important contributions. It is a thoughtful book that must be read by every hospitality manager. I was particularly impressed by its coverage of both the pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic landscape. Practitioners and policy makers will find the in-depth analysis of the barriers to woman leadership in hospitality very helpful. Understanding these roadblocks is critical in helping organizations overcome these challenges. Meaningful change demands a simultaneous focus on both individuals and systems. Professor Kumar's powerful change models are a highlight of the book.

*Sukhbir Sandhu*, Associate Professor and Executive Director, Centre for Workplace Excellence, UniSA Business, University of South Australia, Australia

The Indian hospitality industry has had a poor track record in regard to gender equality and Dr Payal Kumar's book *Gender Equity in Hospitality: The Case of*

*India* is a must-read for leaders who want to make a difference. With detailed verbatim comments, it is an insightful read that can help any hospitality company put together a clear roadmap towards achieving its environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals. I am hopeful that together we can all recalibrate the playing field and see many more women in hospitality board rooms.

*Kanika Hasrat*, Area Director UP, MP and Uttarakhand and General Manager at Taj Lakefront Bhopal at The Indian Hotel Company Limited, and President of Women Indian Chamber for Commerce and Industry (WICCI) for Hospitality and Tourism, India

Given the importance and pace of growth of the hospitality and tourism sector for the Indian economy, this is a timely study as it addresses the twin cultural issues of a lack of gender diversity and inequitable promotion practices in hospitality and tourism in India. The current undeniable domination of studies focused on Western contexts makes this a valuable contribution to the field.

*Ruth Pühr*, Head of Quality Assurance and Academic Development, Les Roches Global Hospitality Education, Switzerland

In *Gender Equity in Hospitality: The Case of India*, Prof Payal Kumar draws attention to how cultural nuances and other factors shape and impact careers in the hospitality industry in India. Drawn from extensive research and her own observations, the book contains practical recommendations for policy makers and industry leaders that would enable more women to be included, engaged and have successful stints in the hospitality industry. In a world where purpose and ways of working are being redefined, this is a highly relevant read.

*Aarti Kelshikar*, Founder, 3A Consulting, and Author of *How Women Work: Fitting In and Standing Out in Asia*

This much-needed book offers valuable insights into the barriers to woman leadership in the Indian hospitality sector, both on the individual and systemic level. It deals incisively with the gendered and gendering problems of the sector constructed at the level of individual identities and cultural expectations embedded into interaction, institutional opportunities, and constraints. This book will be valuable for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who want to understand barriers to woman leadership in a patriarchal and high-power distance society and who strive for a systemic change in the sector. It will also enrich the lives of hospitality students who want to understand gender discrimination and make a difference in their lives and in the field.

*Regine Bendl*, Associate Professor, Institute for Gender and Diversity in Organizations, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

# Gender Equity in Hospitality: The Case of India

BY

**PAYAL KUMAR**

*Indian School of Hospitality, India*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*I dedicate this book to my younger sister Leena Khurana,  
who has taught me more than she will ever know.*

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# Contents

List of Tables and Figures	<i>xi</i>
About the Author	<i>xiii</i>
Foreword <i>by Ashish Malik</i>	<i>xv</i>
Preface	<i>xix</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>xxi</i>
<b>Chapter 1 Tourism and Hospitality: Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Pandemic</b>	<i>1</i>
The Global Gender Gap	<i>4</i>
Women in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry	<i>6</i>
Objectives of the Study	<i>8</i>
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review</b>	<i>13</i>
Gender Stereotypes and Prejudices	<i>14</i>
Variables in the Hospitality Industry	<i>18</i>
Work–Life Interface	<i>22</i>
<b>Chapter 3 Study Results: Barriers to Woman Leadership in Hospitality Industry</b>	<i>25</i>
Study Method	<i>25</i>
Themes Elicited from Interviews	<i>27</i>
Post-study Round-table Discussion	<i>37</i>
Barriers	<i>38</i>
Enablers	<i>39</i>
<b>Chapter 4 Models for Individual and Systematic Change</b>	<i>41</i>
Firm-level Examples	<i>41</i>
An Individual-level Example	<i>42</i>
Food and Beverage Industry: A Gender Parity Initiative	<i>46</i>

<b>Chapter 5 Recommendations</b>	<b>49</b>
By Study Respondents	49
Recommendations for Policy Makers and Industry Leaders in India	55
Recommendations to Scholars for Further Research	59
<b>Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion</b>	<b>61</b>
People-centric Industry Vying for Talent	61
Themes in Relation to the Life Cycle of a Woman	62
Conclusion	66
Appendix	69
Further Reading: Related Books by This Author	75
References	77
Index	85

# List of Tables and Figures

## Tables

Table 1.	Themes and Subthemes on Gender Equity from the Literature	15
Table 2.	Sample Representation of Gender and Job Ranking	25

## Appendix Tables

Table A1.	Student Perception of Internship Experience in the Hospitality Industry	69
Table A2.	Employee Data on Gender Representation (2022)	70
Table A3.	Respondents' Views on the Qualities of the Ideal Leader	71

## Figures

Fig. 1.	Steady Growth and Global GDP Contribution of Travel and Tourism	9
Fig. 2.	Thematic Tree of First and Second Order Themes	26
Fig. 3.	Indicative Barriers at Three Levels of Analyses	63

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## About the Author

**Dr Payal Kumar** is Principal Academic Advisor at Indian School of Hospitality, India, the South Asian Ambassador for *Academy of Management Discoveries Journal*, and Emerald Publisher Brand Ambassador. She completed her Master of Arts from the School of Oriental and African Studies, UK, and PhD from XLRI, India. As a researcher, her accolades include the best symposium for the MED division, Academy of Management Conference, Seattle, USA, 2022 and the Andre Delbecq & Lee Robbins MSR (Academy of Management) Scholarship. She is an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*, and Senior Reviewer for top journals such as *Journal of Organization Behaviour*. She has published 17 books so far, including a 5-volume series on Leadership and Followership (Palgrave Macmillan). In an earlier avatar, she was Vice President of Editorial and Production at SAGE Publications Ltd.

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# Foreword

*Ashish Malik*

It is critical that one develops an understanding of the western term ‘hospitality’ by contextualizing what the phenomenon of hospitality means as per rich and deep-seated Indian cultural beliefs. The notion of serving guests has immense historical, spiritual and cultural importance in the Indian Vedic scriptures, propagated through scriptures and the oral tradition in India. In popular press and wider cultural beliefs, the abridged Sanskrit mantra *Atithidevo Bhava*, which roughly translates to ‘treat a Guest as a God’ or ‘A Guest is akin to God’ captures the essence of service, welcoming and invocations that followers of the Hindu and Sanathan Dharam popularly practise. Other interpretations of the Hindu Vedic scriptures of the above Sanskrit Mantra focus on welcoming and serving the ‘Brahmana’, a person who has deep spiritual knowledge and comes without intimation as your guest. Given this background, if someone turns up uninvited at your place in India, it is common to greet them and serve them food. Many first-time visitors to India return home with stories of the great hospitality they experienced.

In fact, guests are welcomed in a God-like manner with offerings of *Dhupa* (fragrance), *Dipa* (Lamp), *Naidevya* (Food), *Akshata* (Rice) and *Pushpa* (flowers). The Department of Tourism’s advertising also captures the *Atithidevo Bhava* ethos and aims to reinforce social awareness through its campaign as its citizens welcome guests into the country. Often women play a key role in welcoming guests.

The promotional campaign and observable cultural practices serve as a good reinforcement and differentiator for the Tourism Department’s Incredible India campaign. The campaign helps attract tourists from all around the world, highlighting the differences in experiences of the cultural practices between the West and East, something which was aptly captured many years ago in Rudyard Kipling’s composition, *The Ballad of East and West*: ‘Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet; Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat’ ([https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems\\_eastwest.htm](https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_eastwest.htm)).

India and the Western world’s cultural diversity has been noted in several seminal cultural frameworks, such as those of Hofstede (2001) and House et al. (2007). Recent accounts of India’s cultural singularities and social complexity by Laleman et al. (2014) and Malik and Pereira (2016) also further our understanding.

In addition to cultural influences, Indian societal attitudes towards women are also shaped by religious, social and institutional beliefs. India has been

characterized as a high power-distance and patriarchal society. Unfortunately, this affects the framing at multiple levels of what should be the professional role of women in India. Despite the promise of rapid growth in the hospitality industry in India, some systemic issues persist. For example, there is still a seeming preference for employing a more significant proportion of men in senior positions relative to women, who are employed more in junior positions (Chaudhary & Gupta, 2010). Among the common prejudices in the industry are that women cannot cope with long and late shifts and can also not maintain a healthy work–life balance (Doherty, 2004). Additional barriers to advancing women’s senior leadership roles include developmental discrepancies and cultural discouragement (Patwardhan, Mayya, & Joshi, 2016).

There are several gendered issues relating to the success of women professionals working in the hospitality sector. Building on the cultural, religious and social complexities mentioned above, Professor Payal Kumar builds on her dedicated scholarship that focusses on gender studies in an Indian context and delivers yet another powerful and insightful account of gender equity in hospitality. This monograph is a sequel to her earlier Emerald book on *Gender Equity in the Boardroom: The Case of India* (2020), co-authored with Dr Ganesh Singh. Focusing on a complex range of professional identities and issues of gender-based inequality in Indian society, Professor Kumar picks up on the vital issue of gender and diversity. Such an account is relevant not only to diversity and inclusion scholars but also to critical management studies scholars.

This research is a rich addition to the existing literature, as it bridges our gaps in understanding the differences in the specific role stressors for men and women – including why women experience more significant role stagnation than men. The extant literature does not address this; thus, research on the antecedents for the lack of leadership opportunities for women in India’s hospitality and tourism sectors is timely. Researching the state of gender equity in the hospitality industry in the post-pandemic era was preceded by a white paper by the author on the same topic and sponsored by the Women’s Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (WICCI) and the Indian School of Hospitality.

Professor Kumar employs a two-staged methodology for her exploratory study on this vital topic. First, as a preliminary study, she examines the antecedents of low participation levels of women in leadership positions in the hospitality industry in India. Professor Kumar analysed the data from 23 in-depth interviews of senior- and mid-level leaders, both male and female. These interviews were coded, and then within-case and between-case themes were elicited to understand the barriers to women’s leadership. Second, she collected data on the representation of women leaders in three-star to five-star luxury hotels, as currently, there is no such account of consolidated data on this topic.

The book covers the much-debated issues of gender equity or ‘fairness of treatment’ for women regarding their rights, benefits and opportunities in a society that expects the woman to be the primary caregiver at home. The book also offers comparisons with western trends in hospitality. The findings of this research have important insights for leaders in the hospitality industry. It unpacks the barriers to gender equity at three levels of analyses: at the individual level it

was found that women employees face more work–life pressure than their male counterparts; at the group level stereotyping by colleagues and paternalistic attitudes of bosses proves to be hindrance; and at the firm level there was found to be a lack of mentoring opportunities.

There are implications also for HR practitioners, and learners can gain insights from success stories of what HR practitioners did in terms of ‘good HR policies’ for women, such as including flexitime, which leaders in this industry can emulate. The study findings are likely to be useful as a stepping-stone for policy makers, government and industry leaders to rebound from the pandemic to transform India into one of the top 20 tourist destinations in the world.

The book is timely as the hospitality and tourism industries globally, not just in India, were reeling under pressures imposed by the pandemic and are now on a turbo-charged growth path in the post-pandemic world. The tourism industry is predicted to grow rapidly until the end of 2023, fuelled by the expected expansion of the e-visa scheme by the Government of India. Such rapid growth necessitates addressing several workforce issues such as employee attrition, equitable and fair compensation, and opening up diverse workforce opportunities. These issues are critical as they strongly affect the firm’s success and industry growth as an economic driver for the nation.

All in all, this book offers a rich case study account of a contextual understanding of the barriers to leadership that women in India face in light of a patriarchal and high-power distance society. My congratulations to Professor Payal Kumar for such insightful research.

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# Preface

Together with an enthusiastic research team, I began to deep dive into trying to understand the barriers and potential opportunities for women leaders in the hospitality industry. What could be the reasons for so few women making it to top leadership positions in the Indian context? And that too when in other sectors women have done remarkably well in breaking the glass ceiling. For example, India has the highest number of female pilots in the world at 12.4% which is twice the global average, even though this is a profession that involves 100% travelling and also shift work. Financial services and the banking sector is another area where women have stormed the male bastion. In both these examples, women have managed to soar to leadership positions in spite of the gender stereotypes that ‘women can’t read maps’ and that ‘women are not good with numbers.’ So why is it that women in hospitality can’t fly as high, in an industry that one would imagine that women are naturally attuned to?

That this industry is male dominated is pretty much a global phenomenon. Dr Maria Gebbels, senior lecturer in hospitality management at the University of Greenwich, said: ‘In comparison to other sectors, the hospitality industry has a long-standing history of being male-dominated, traditional, and paternalistic, resulting in conflicts of power and gender inequality’ (<https://www.thecaterer.com/news/surrey-greenwich-university-report-gender-equality-hospitality>). But I was curious about what were the specific barriers and opportunities for women in the hospitality industry in India?

The results of this study suggest that what perhaps stands out in India at the entry-level as a barrier is the strong stereotype that this is not a suitable industry for women. Long working hours and also the social taboo of women working in bars are distinct entry barriers. One can only conjecture about the ‘missing women’ – in other words, those that want to join the industry, but who are discouraged from doing so by their family. There is no way to quantify the number of these potential hires. It is worthy to point out that post-liberalization in other industries such as information technology, women have been entering in large droves.

This study also notes that at the mid-management level, many women drop out because juggling the pressures of both family and work becomes too much, thus creating a ‘leaky pipeline problem’ – where there are not enough female candidates to recommend for more senior positions. And for mid-managers in this industry, upward growth becomes next to impossible unless candidates are up for geographical relocation. I must add that this monograph is not all about doom

and gloom, but also about hope! There is one chapter dedicated to stories of exceptional individual success, and also path-breaking gender-friendly initiatives at the firm level.

One recommendation for overcoming the bias of ‘think manager, think male’ is for industry leaders to reflect on whether a leader necessarily has to be an agentic male, simply because this has been the precedent in the industry so far. They may want to move from this auto-pilot mode, introspect, and rethink the leadership qualities required in the industry, using a different lens, for example, contemplating a style of leadership that may be more androgynous in nature.

This study adds to the literature of the Global South, and in doing so showcases the importance of the national and cultural contextualization of a phenomenon. It is hoped that our pain-staking research on the India story will not only provide conceptual richness to the study on gender equity, by providing insights into how women navigate a patriarchal and at times paternalistic work terrain, but also that the recommendations at the end of the monograph will be useful for global readers too (both policy makers and scholars).

To sum up, in the context of an ever-expanding industry that is seeing tectonic shifts, it is anticipated that this monograph will provide a deeper understanding for the reader of the existing scenario by penetrating the surface of everyday practices and discourses, to reveal deeply embedded practices, viewpoints and biases.

**Payal Kumar**

Author of the following related titles:

- *Gender Equity in the Boardroom: The Case of India*. Emerald Group Publishing, 2020 (Co-author Dr Ganesh Singh)
- *Mentorship-driven Talent Management: The Asian Experience*. Emerald Group Publishing, 2020 (Co-author Prof. Pawan Budhwar)
- *Exploring Dynamic Mentoring Models in India*. Springer International Publishing, 2018.
- *Indian Women as Entrepreneurs: An Exploration of Self-identity*. Springer International Publishing, 2016.
- *Unveiling Women's Leadership: Identity and Meaning of Leadership in India*. Springer International Publishing, 2015.

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I must acknowledge the leadership of the Indian School of Hospitality (ISH), Gurugram, India, represented by Mr Dilip Puri, Founder and CEO, and also Mr Kunal Vasudeva, Co-founder and COO. Had they not brought me into the lap of the ISH family and introduced me to the world of hospitality, this book would never have materialized. Further wings were provided by those at the helm of the Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who encouraged me to write the white paper that preceded this book.

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## Chapter 1

# Tourism and Hospitality: Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Pandemic

The tourism and hospitality industry – one of the major contributors to the world economy – is exceptionally people-centric. In the editorial of *The State of Hospitality – Insight Report* published by Sommet Education, March 2022, the CEO of Sommet Education Benoît-Etienne Domenget writes,

Hospitality is more than a business. It's a community of contemporary nomads sharing the same curiosity for travel, an openness to different cultures, the attention to detail, the willingness to welcome and please others.<sup>1</sup>

This industry is quite vast, broadly comprising the following sub-categories: lodging, including a range of properties from luxury hotels, to bed and breakfasts, to camping grounds; food and beverage, which includes establishments that sell food and drinks for consumption on or off premises; recreation, which includes venues for entertainment and relaxation, such as theme parks, theatres, etc.; and travel and tourism, including airlines and cruises.

Before the pandemic, at a global level, the travel and tourism sector alone accounted for 10.4% of the global gross domestic product (GDP; USD 9.2 trillion), 6.8% of the total exports, or 27.4% of the global services exports in the form of international visitor spending. This sector created one out of every four new jobs, accounting for 10.6% of all jobs. This sector took a big hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic, suffering a loss of approximately USD 4.5 trillion in 2020, with its contribution to the global GDP declining by a massive 49.1%, with job losses amounting to 62 million worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*The State of Hospitality 2022 – Insight Report* published by Sommet Education – March 2022. file:///C:/Users/ish080/Downloads/The%20State%20of%20Hospitality%202022%20-%20LD%20(3).pdf, accessed on 6 January 2023.

<sup>2</sup><https://wtcc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>, accessed on 21 December 2022.

## 2 Gender Equity in Hospitality

Today the room for growth is tremendous.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations (UN) World Tourism Organization forecasts 1.8 billion international tourists by 2030. One area that is growing rapidly is sustainable tourism, or the adoption of responsible practices by the tourism industry by acknowledging both its negative and positive impacts, eventually maximizing the positives and minimizing the negatives. The notable positive aspects of sustainable tourism include employment generation, preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and monumental restoration. Some potential negatives are climate change, overcrowding at popular destinations, damage to environment and heritage properties, excessive energy consumption, and economic leakage. So important is sustainable tourism that in the UN's Sustainable Development goals target 8.9, the aim is to devise and implement policies by 2030 to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and also promotes local culture.

In the financial year 2019–2020, the Indian travel and tourism industry was ranked 10th in the world, among 185 countries with respect to contribution to the GDP. It contributed 6.8% of the country's total GDP and accounted for 8% of the total employment, which is around 39 million jobs. According to estimates, this number will rise up to 53 million jobs by 2029.<sup>4</sup>

Even in pre-pandemic times, the industry faced a unique set of challenges that impacted the number of foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in India. In 2019, India attracted 17.91 million FTAs, compared to even smaller countries that were far ahead, for example, Italy (64.5 million), Turkey (51.2 million), Mexico (45 million), and Thailand (39.8 million).<sup>5</sup> The lack of infrastructure, connectivity, cleanliness, pollution, health, and safety are stated to be the primary reasons for the low FTAs in India. Furthermore, India is perceived as an expensive country in comparison to others such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka.

Another possible reason is that campaigns such as 'Incredible India' may have led to a stereotypical image of the country as a spiritual destination to find one's true self and attain Nirvana, which could be underplaying India as a destination for scenic landscapes and wildlife, eco-tourism, and rural tourism. There is a huge untapped potential for India to also go to the sustainable tourism way, defined as 'tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities' (UNEP & WTO, 2005, p. 12).

India withstood two debilitating waves of COVID-19, but these and the subsequent lock-downs had a disastrous impact both economically and in terms of huge job losses in tourism and hospitality. There were estimated job losses of 14.5 million in 2020's first quarter alone. The industry was caught completely unaware,

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<sup>3</sup>See Fig. 1.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.ibef.org/industry/tourism-hospitality-india>, accessed on 17 January 2023.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.statista.com/statistics/305501/number-of-international-tourist-arrivals-in-india/>, accessed on 20 December 2022.

and managers were perplexed as to what to do in the face of such a calamity (Ghosh & Bhattacharya, 2022; Kaushal & Srivastava, 2020).

Due to financial distress, some travel agencies were delisted and there was also a mass firing of employees in many hotels. However, this knee-jerk reaction backfired to some extent once the lockdown was over, as many of the ex-employees opted to join other industries rather than return to the hospitality sector, leading to a severe talent crunch. Said Gautam Srivastava, Vice President HR, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts,

Attracting talent was always a problem, but this has been aggravated post-pandemic. In the pandemic many hotels let go of up to 30% of their employees. Many now don't want to return because of other opportunities.

He was speaking at the 2022 Hotel Operations Summit – India, at a panel discussion on 'In Search of Talent' moderated by Prahlad Puri, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Indian School of Hospitality (ISH).<sup>6</sup> Other panellists included Ashutosh Khanna, industry HR Expert; Nikhil Sharma, Regional Director, Eurasia at Wyndham Hotels & Resorts; Shiv Agrawal, MD, ABC consultants; and Yogendra Agnihotri, Senior Director Human Resources South Asia at Radisson Hotel Group. The discussion centred around several key points, as follows:

- Today's generation seeks empowerment and freedom in their work as they have multiple opportunities to choose from. It is time to accept that this is a problem that needs more than lip service from the industry.
- Compensation has to be brought to an acceptable level that compares with other industries. Even some start-ups are paying better.
- Work-life balance needs to be looked at, as shift work at hotels is still very regimented.
- It's the first time in the industry that all three generations are working together: Gen Y, X, and Z. It is essential to invest in people managers so they can manage the expectations of all the generations.
- Many fresh hospitality graduates are more attracted to other sectors such as retail, healthcare, and e-commerce such as Amazon.

Dilip Puri, founder and CEO of the ISH, Gurgaon, reiterates these sentiments by saying that leaders are realizing that the industry needs to change the way that human capital is treated in order to stem talent drain, for example, by rationalizing work hours and hiking pay.

I think COVID has been a big teacher for our industry. The industry recognizes that it needs to pay more. I'm already beginning to

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<sup>6</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m20F\\_6bhG\\_U&t=2641s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m20F_6bhG_U&t=2641s), accessed on 20 December 2022.

#### 4 *Gender Equity in Hospitality*

see in a lot of companies a very major effort being made towards pay parity with other competing industries.<sup>7</sup>

In a recent survey conducted on a sample of 170 students of a leading hospitality school regarding their internship experience across leading hotels of international and domestic brands operating in India, only 35% of students expressed a continued willingness to join the industry (see Appendix Table A1). The desire to join other sectors was linked to reputation, payment, and faster growth opportunities. It is increasingly evident that Gen Z, who are on the brink of entering the workforce, have a lot more choices available to them, and that they are willing to weigh these choices before making a final career decision.

Here are what some students said about aspiring to join other industries:

- ‘My career aspirations are still not on a single decision. I would like to experience more in the industry and aligned industries to find out where my interests are.’
- ‘Long working hours and working conditions put me off a career in hospitality.’
- ‘I would like to step into the corporate world and might join a marketing firm.’
- ‘My long-term goal is an entrepreneurial journey, but I would like to start in the marketing domain, across industries.’
- ‘My career aspiration now is to work in a corporate bank.’

To sum up, in the post-pandemic era, while there is definitely a boom in the tourism and hospitality industry in India, especially with the expansion of the e-visa scheme to 171 countries, there are still several workforce issues that need to be ironed out such as employee attrition, long working hours, fair compensation, gender equity issues, and talent drain due to the opening up of diverse alternative opportunities for the workforce. In-depth research on these topics is critical, both to build on existing scholarship and also because these challenges have a strong bearing on the growth of the industry as a continued economic driver for the nation.

### **The Global Gender Gap**

While the global gender gap and also leadership challenges for women to reach the top may seem to be high in South Asian countries like India, a systematic literature review of papers between 1990 and 2021 suggests that barriers faced by women in both developing and developed countries are quite similar (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022). Furthermore, even in developed countries such as the United States, it's not necessarily a rosy picture. In fact, here there are other challenges such as an increasing trend for woman leaders to change jobs at the highest rate

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<sup>7</sup><https://hospitality.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/hotels/hotels-will-start-paying-better-and-rationalising-working-hours-soon-dilip-puri/94931596>

ever, as per a recent McKinsey report on ‘Women at the workplace, 2022’.<sup>8</sup> The reasons range from microaggressions, to seeking a work culture which allows for more flexibility and/or remote work.

Gender parity is a global concern, and it is women who bear the brunt of inequities. In fact, there is a gap of 31.9% at the global level that needs to be addressed in order to achieve gender parity globally, but it will take 132 years to do so (World Economic Forum (WEF), 2022). Women are politically disadvantaged because of lack of representation in parliaments, where women occupy only 25% of seats and governments, and account for 21% of ministerships. Moreover, 85 countries of the 153 countries studied in this report have not elected female heads of state in the last 50 years. At the same time, while there has been an increase in the number of women in senior roles, women’s participation in the labour market is low (55%) in comparison with men (78%).

A wage gap of 40% and an income gap of more than 50% also need to be addressed. In some countries, women find it difficult to begin entrepreneurial ventures because of a lack of access to resources such as finance, land, and credit. All these factors lead to widening financial disparities between men and women.

The report estimates that South Asia, having closed only 35.7% of the gender gap, will take 197 years to achieve gender parity. The subindices economic participation and opportunity (35.7%) and political empowerment (26.3%) contribute to the gender disparities in this region (WEF, 2022). India, the largest country in this region, geographically and economically, is ranked at 135 out of 146 countries with only 62.9% of the gender gap closed. In comparison, Bangladesh is ranked 71 with 71.4% of the gap addressed. The least performing country in the region is Afghanistan, which is ranked 146, with 43.5% parity achieved.

The subindices in India are similar to other countries in South Asia as a whole, including low participation of women in the labour force, leading to a lack of economic and financial independence, and also political disempowerment leading to a lack of proper representation in the corridors of power. Of particular concern is the fact that women’s participation in the labour force has been on the decline over the past few decades. According to data from the World Bank, the female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) in India has seen a decline from 30.27% in 1990 to 20.8% in 2019.

Another important finding from the report is that globally the jobs performed by men and women have become gendered. For instance, domains such as cloud computing, engineering, and data and artificial intelligence are mostly for male, while domains that involve people and culture such as teaching are more for female. Furthermore, an extremely significant aspect of women’s economic participation is that they are often engaged in work that is undervalued and largely invisible, while overall putting in more hours than that of men at the workplace.

Furthermore, women in leadership positions are few and far between. India is ranked 135 out of a total 146 countries on the index of the WEF Global Gender

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

Gap,<sup>9</sup> which is hardly becoming of a nation which has risen to the ranks of the fifth largest economy in the world, having overtaken the United Kingdom. In my Emerald Publishers book that preceded this one, namely *Gender Equity in the Boardroom: The Case of India* (2020), co-authored with Dr Ganesh Singh, we examined female boardroom representation to try and understand why the number of women in the corporate boardroom was still less than international numbers, in spite of affirmative action in which the Companies Act (2013) prescribes that at least one female director needs to be appointed to company boards in India for every listed company and also for every public company with a turnover of 3 billion INR or more. In our study, we found that even if women were represented as board members, they were often a family member of the founder of the company instead of independent director candidates.

We found barriers to growth at three levels of analysis. For example, at the individual level, some women felt there was an uneven playing field when it came to biology, with women having to take time out for childbirth and childcare. At the group level, there appears to be more networking exposure for men, which is very important for selection on corporate boards. Finally, at the firm level of analysis, it was found that some leaders were paternalistic which hindered career growth (e.g. not sending women to remote locations in an effort to protect their safety), and that there were also less mentorship opportunities.

Women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic as per the Global Gender Gap Report (WEF, 2022). For example, in India, women lost jobs at a higher rate, while domestic violence soared to unprecedented levels. The then President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, openly acknowledged in a letter to young Indians how women in India were put under a triple burden due to the pandemic. They did paid work, unpaid work, and also had to tutor their children who were now doing online classes from the confines of their homes. He wrote, ‘... as children attend school from home, their learning has to be supplemented by the parents, and that task usually falls on the mother’.<sup>10</sup>

### **Women in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry**

According to the Global Report on Women in Tourism (UNWTO, 2019), 54% of the workforce employed in the tourism industry are women, with a pay gap of 14.7% between men and women. In the Asia-Pacific too, women account for 53% of the tourism workforce. However, most women are employed in this industry perform jobs with poor working conditions and pay. Also, women are more constrained by traditional gender norms and roles, in comparison with men, which dictate what women can or cannot do, whether they can or cannot work.

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<sup>9</sup><https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>, accessed on 21 December 2022.

<sup>10</sup><https://indiaeducationdiary.in/kfc-india-extends-growth-opportunities-for-women-leaders-with-their-first-area-coaches-programme-for-women/>, accessed on 8 November 2022.

Cultural traditions, which prescribe traditional gender roles in the home and workplace, combine with workplace cultures and expectations in tourism that disadvantage women who aspire to a reasonable balance between work and family (child and elder) care responsibilities. (UNWTO, 2019, p. 96)

In Asia, in general, gender parity has never been a key discussion point in tourism policies and industry events, whereas technology and economy always are. In addition, data are also not available for all sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry, and whatever is available cannot be generalized for the whole of the continent, because of the diversity between the various regions and sub-regions. Yet, tourism can play a critical role in achieving the commitments at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – gender equality, women’s empowerment, and inclusive development (UNWTO, 2019).

Women do, however, have the option of pursuing entrepreneurial ventures in the tourism sector, even in rural areas, and they can do so with moderate start-up financing (International Finance Corporation (IFC), 2017). The road to entrepreneurship, however, brings forth its own challenges. There are several constraints, namely inadequate access to collateral, financing, markets, technology, information, business skills, and education and training (IFC, 2017). In spite of women preferring to hire other women in management roles in their businesses, the ‘ideal worker’ stereotype in the tourism and hospitality industry is still considered as male, which hampers women’s career progression (Costa, Bakas, Breda, Durão, Carvalho, et al., 2017).

The Castell Project has been tracking corporate performance in terms of gender diversity, mostly in the US and Canadian hospitality management, by means of its annual report among other initiatives. According to The Castell Project (2020) report, overall women held 12% of the leadership roles in the hospitality industry, such as ‘chief, managing director, president, partner, principal, and CEO’ (p. 3). Women perform leadership roles mostly in areas such as accounting, human resources, legal, marketing, and revenue management departments. What is of particular concern, however, is the fact that while at the manager, director, and vice president level, men and women are fairly evenly poised, it becomes tougher for women to break the glass ceiling to attain roles as partner/principal, C-suite leader, managing director, or president. In fact, the odds of women achieving CEO roles are one woman to 20.4 men. There were no comparable reports found for South Asia.

It is evident from all the aforementioned reports that women across the world face systemic, deeply entrenched problems. In the tourism and hospitality industry in particular, these disadvantages are reflected in the status of women – low pay, low status jobs at the entry level, stagnation in the middle management levels, and barriers on the way to boardrooms and senior executive roles to name a few. There is, therefore, a lot of ground to cover in order to achieve gender parity at multiple levels.

One noticeable trend in the hospitality industry in India which deserves further study is gender equity – or the lack of it – given the apparent preference for

## 8 *Gender Equity in Hospitality*

men in senior positions and younger women at lower levels (Chaudhary & Gupta, 2010) in a country that is high in patriarchy and masculinity. As per Hofstede's (2001) dimensions,

Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. (p. 297)

Said Meena Bhatia, Vice President and General Manager of Le Meridien New Delhi,

Coming from the baby boomer generation, we were faced with not only lack of opportunities, but lack of social acceptance for careers in hospitality. The role of women in hospitality was often misconstrued; the space was male dominated with the exception of a few trivial positions that could be occupied by men.<sup>11</sup>

Common prejudices in the industry include the perception that women are not to cope with the pressure of long office hours, night shifts, nor are able to maintain a healthy work–life interface (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). To compound these prejudices, there are other obstacles to woman's leadership advancement such as less developmental training compared to male counterparts, and also cultural discouragement (Patwardhan, Mayya, & Joshi, 2016). Conscious and unconscious biases that are associated with gendered culture and discriminatory practices seem to be prevalent in most industries (Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). No recent research has been conducted on why less female representation in leadership roles still exists for women in the hospitality sector in India, hence this study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Research on gender issues within the tourism and hospitality industry has not been as substantial as in other areas such as history, sociology, or management studies. And yet, the need for understanding gender challenges and opportunities in hospitality research and education is substantial (Morgan & Pritchard, 2019). In the past, questions about gender have been dismissed as a minority concern (Oakley, 2006) or as disruptive (Tribe, 2010).

Moreover, the myth of gender neutrality is perpetuated by making gender invisible.

Gender neutrality is such a widely accepted practice in business that women, and anyone else who feels they do not really fit into the

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<sup>11</sup><https://hospitality.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/speaking-heads/let-us-think-and-act-differently/81391004>, accessed on 21 December 2022.